

Seeker of the Stone's Soul: The Dreaded NO

by Bruce Salisbury

After making several wonderful pieces of stone sculpture and spending lots of money on classes, tools and stone, the artist looks to the real world for acceptance. Like the newly hatched bird breaking free from the safety of the protective shell, the artist stands firmly behind the work that proclaims him an artist.

Hours have been spent locating a suitable binder, taking pictures and writing the Bio for the perfect portfolio. More hours have been spent researching potential galleries on the web, in phone books, and driving to galleries to ensure a perfect fit. Hesitantly, the artist calls the gallery and asks permission to have the gallery jury review his work. Carefully, the cover letter is crafted to catch the attention of the gallery, in hopes they will be as eager as he to sell the sculptures.

In the hands now of the gallery owner, the portfolio stands alone and in a few well-crafted words and a few well-taken pictures, representing all that the artist has done. During a discussion at a frequently visited coffee house the artist listens as his brother-in-law boasts about it "all being in the presentation." Referring to his annual presentation at the loan office to obtain his multi-million dollar loan necessary to keep the family farm up and running. The artist knows his brother-in-law could be right. But the sculpture has to count for more than the presentation, doesn't it?

Returning from work a couple of weeks after submitting the portfolio, the artist listens to a voice message: "Please call so-and-so at the gallery to discuss your work." Excitedly he calls the gallery. But the gallery owner has gone home already. Having to wait until tomorrow, thoughts dance thought the artist's mind. Which pieces do they want to display? How will they be displayed? So, the excitement grows. After all, the portfolio has not been returned with the self-addressed envelope the artist had provided.

The next day, from his real daytime job, the artist calls the gallery owner. "Hello so-and-so, this is the artist

returning your call about my juried portfolio!" Yes, hello. Gallery owner – "your work is really good, it just will not fit here. Would you like to stop by and pick up your portfolio?" Stunned, the artist requests that the portfolio be returned in the mail. It's good that the artist wore boots that day, for surely his heart would have easily fallen out through his feet.

In a fog, the artist has to occupy his mind with something else to maintain balance. Painfully, the artist tries to deal with rejection. Everything has gone into his work and portfolio; everything.

Questions, self doubt. So much is now at stake. The fire burned within, the artist was better than a simple "NO." Were the pictures poorly taken? Was it something in the Bio? Was it the price of the pieces? Were they too big or heavy? Was it the medium? After all, the gallery does not sell stone work. They sell metal, wood, glass, paintings and jewelry, but not stone. The artist had failed to obtain any information that would have provided valuable insight into how to prepare for the next jury.

During an earlier conversation something was said about an artist not having a solid focus. Was this his case? Had the artist's experimentation with different stones and different styles been the cause? In over his year and a half of part-time sculpting, the artist had tried alabaster, granite, soapstone, Belgian black limestone, BC marble and cararra marble. From those stones the artist had sculpted hands, snails, bowls, and abstracts. Maybe that was it; no clear vision had been declared.

It's time to face reality again. The artist must focus, and to focus, the artist needs to seek out a space to call his own. There the artist will find his own calling and artistic commentary. It will take time, energy, and much internal searching to find within himself what will define this artist.

Raising his head and opening his eyes, the artist now knows after meditation and soul searching what path to follow. Hand and mallet raised, the chisel strikes, and a piece of stone flies off.

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